Preventing Infection

Preventing infection is critical to your health. It is especially important in the hospital. Many people are in close quarters and a sick body doesn't fight infection as well. The most important way to prevent the spread of infection is through hand washing and using hand sanitizers.

Hand Washing
Wet your hands and use enough soap for a good lather. Rub your hands together for 15 to 30 seconds. Scrub all surfaces. Then rinse well with water. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet to keep your hands clean.

Hand Sanitizer
Alcohol-based hand sanitizer kills germs on your hands. Use it when your hands are not visibly dirty.
Apply enough to cover your hands. Rub your hands together using friction for 15 to 30 seconds until dry. If your hands dry in less than 15 seconds, there was not enough sanitizer. Get more and repeat for 15 to 30 seconds.

When to Clean
- When your hands are dirty.
- Before and after contact with another patient, family member or health care worker.
- Before eating and drinking.
- Before and after handling food.
- After handling dirty items.
- After blowing your nose, sneezing and going to the restroom.

Patients with Increased Infection Risk
- Cancer patients who are receiving treatment.
- Neutropenic patients (patients with a low white blood cell count).
- Stem cell transplant (SCT) patients.
- Leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma patients (hematologic cancers).

Other Ways to Protect Against Infection
- Remind members of your health care team to complete hand hygiene.
- Do not touch your nose, eyes or mouth with unwashed fingers.
- Do not share personal items, such as dishes, towels, creams, toothbrushes, etc.
- Avoid anyone with an infectious illness or an acute respiratory illness (sneezing, coughing, and sore throat). If this is not possible, you and they should wear masks until their symptoms disappear.
- Wash hands often, especially before you eat and after you use the bathroom.
- Take a warm (not hot) bath, shower or sponge bath every day. Pat your skin dry using a light touch. Don't rub.
- Clean cuts, scrapes, and broken skin right away with warm water and soap. Use an antibiotic ointment and cover with a bandage.

Extra Precautions

Ask your healthcare team if the following strategies are recommended for you:

- Wear a mask when outside your hospital room and/or outside your home.
- Wear a mask in crowded public areas.
- Wear a mask in construction areas. (This includes any area where parts of buildings or streets are being repaired, torn down or constructed. Large amounts of dust and debris may be present in the air.)
- Ask your visitors or family members to wear a mask. (In many cases, visitors should always wear a mask while in a patient's room and should change the mask when it becomes damp.)
- Avoid peak hours in public areas (theaters, restaurants, indoor playgrounds, etc.).
- Avoid animal facilities (zoos, butterfly museums, pet stores, etc.).
- Avoid pet care (cleaning litter boxes, birdcages, dog waste, etc.).

More Information

If you have questions concerning how to prevent infection, ask your health care team.